ENGL 108D: Digital Lives
Spring 2015
2:30-3:50, Tuesdays and Thursdays
HH 150

Taught By:

Kasandra Arthur
Email: karthur@uwaterloo.ca
Office: PAS 1062
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:15-2:15 pm

Course Description:

In this course we will examine how digital communication technologies create and promote online identities and social spaces, as well as interpersonal and communal interactions. We will learn to think critically about our own digital lives by working collaboratively to talk out the many issues associated with digital media, examining both the micro and the macro. We will also be talking about our lives – how we as people interact with one another using digital media. As such, we will be thinking critically about ourselves and our own contexts. In short, we are going to work together to develop more nuanced understandings of how we relate to and through digital media.

Course Objectives:

• Improve our critical thinking skills
• Develop more nuanced understandings of our interactions with digital media
• Strengthen our ability to communicate these nuanced understandings in a variety of genres
• Learn to work more productively as members of a community towards these objectives

Required Readings:

• Additional readings and media will be emailed to you through your University of Waterloo email address
ENGL 108D: Digital Lives

Evaluation:

- Critical Participation
- Short Paper
- Final Paper
*All of these assignments will be graded, in part, through group maintained blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Value of Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Throughout the term; group and self evaluation due Tuesday, July 28th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Thursday, June 11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog posts</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>First by Thursday, May 28th; second by Thursday, June 25th; final by Thursday, July 30th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Thursday, June 25th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated thesis statement, first paragraph, and outline</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Thursday, July 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Tuesday, July 28th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignment Descriptions:

All assignments must be done in MLA format. All paper assignments must be double spaced in 12 point Times New Roman font.

Group Blog: In groups of around 4, you will develop your own course blog. Each member of the group will write and upload blog posts that respond to the course content – both the readings and the discussions stemming from those readings – consistently throughout the course. These posts do not need to be connected, though group members will have to work together to set up a schedule for posts to avoid having too many posts one week and not enough the next. I expect each group to upload at least one post a week, with two or even three times being more realistic between the group. Additionally, you will read and respond to one another’s posts – both within your own group and beyond it. You may use a(n appropriate) pseudonym if you are uncomfortable using your own name online – just make sure to let me know so I can credit you for your work. At the end of the term, you will hand in group and self evaluations for your contributions to this blog which will factor into your Critical Participation grade. While the blogs themselves will not be assigned a grade, the work you do on them will contribute significantly to everything that will be evaluated; take them seriously (but I hope you have fun with them!).
*remember that you must cite everything in MLA format, even when it is for the blog*
**Critical Participation:** This portion of your grade reflects the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course content, both the readings and the discussions stemming from those readings. It will evaluate both your in class engagement (your ability to contribute to discussions, ask questions, answer questions) and your engagement in the group blogs (your contribution to the blog organization, your posts, your comments on others posts). If you are uncomfortable with using your name online, you may use a(n appropriate) pseudonym – just let me know so I can be sure to credit you for your work. This grade will evaluate the level of engagement that you demonstrate, not just whether or not you show up (though your engagement is contingent upon your presence).

**Short Paper:** The purpose of this assignment is to have you develop your writing skills and allow you to gain an understanding of how academic writing is evaluated in this class. You will develop one of your early blog posts into a 4-6 page paper by filling out your earlier ideas with secondary research. You will use at least two scholarly sources in this process, though you may use more if you should so desire. I recommend applying a theoretical concept we discuss in class to a primary object (like, how Netflix’s season of Arrested Development differs from the original series because of the affordances of the medium or how people perform socio-economic status by taking and posting pictures of their food on Instagram) for this brief paper, but I am receptive to other ideas if you are interested in trying something different – just make sure you run it past me first. Papers will be graded based on the level of critical analysis developed, the extent to which scholarly sources are integrated into the paper (not just amount, but how well the ideas are used), clarity of communication, and thorough use of citation.

**Final Paper:** You will be working on the idea of this paper all term. By Thursday, May 28th you will each upload a post on your group blog where you discuss a particular digital thing you are interested in. This could be duckface selfies, or MuggleNet, or a specific subreddit, or a Facebook trend, or Duolingo, or The Pirate Bay, or the Fappening, or LOLcats – just something that you find interesting going on online. Throughout the term, you will write at least two more posts about this – one by Thursday, June 25th (so you can apply that which you learn in your Annotated Bibliography), and one by Thursday, July 30th (so that you can apply that which you learn while writing the final paper) – where you update your thoughts about this thing based on your readings in class and your independent research. Feel free to post more frequently about this subject, so long as you don’t cease posting about the rest of the class readings and discussions. The paper will be between 8-10 pages and will discuss, in depth, your subject as it relates to digital media – the way particular media affordances and constraints affect your subject, the way in which systems of privilege are reiterated and/or challenged, so on and so forth. Basically, I want you to talk, academically, about how the theories we learn factor into your topic. You will hand in this assignment in stages – in addition to the blog posts, you will also hand in an annotated bibliography, an anticipated thesis statement, first paragraph, and outline, and, of course, the final paper itself. I will provide detailed commentary at all of these stages with the ultimate goal of a great final paper, so taking the time to look through these comments will likely benefit you.
Course Policies:

Student Responsibilities: Students are required to read all assigned material and come to every class prepared to discuss the topics thoughtfully and in a respectful manner. Part of this means arriving on time, having mobile phones either off or silent during class time, not having distracting computer programs open during class time, and paying attention to the questions and comments of your classmates.

Extensions: Extensions may be given in rare cases. The earlier an extension is requested, the more likely it is to be granted. While I do not require personal details, documentation may be requested to prove illness or emergency. All extensions requests must be sent in email so both you and I have documentation to refer to. No extensions will be given for the final essay.

Late Policy: Assignments submitted late without an approved extension will be subject to late penalties of 5% per day, including weekends without a limit. I will, therefore, not accept assignments more than 20 days late. All assignments are due during class time – if I do not receive it by the time class ends, it will be considered late. Please note that I do not accept assignments submitted via email unless I have given specific and explicit permission for students to do so, and, even in this case, hard copies must also be submitted. If I do not receive a hard copy of an assignment I said you could email to me, I cannot guarantee that your assignment will be graded. I also do not accept assignments handed in under or on my office door under any circumstances. You are responsible for ensuring I receive your assignments. No paper assignments will be accepted after Tuesday, July 28th and no blog post uploaded will be graded after Thursday, July 30th (these will be still subject to late penalties if they are for assignments with earlier due dates).

Email Policy: Students are required to check their university email accounts regularly as course information will occasionally be emailed through that system, possibly including some readings. Emails regarding course business should be sent to my university email address (karthur@uwaterloo.ca) with the course number in the subject heading. Please ensure your emails are clear and direct. While I will try to respond to emails promptly, this is not always possible; please allow up to 36 hours for a response. Students cannot hand in assignments via email unless given explicit permission to do so by me (to be determined on a case-by-case basis) and, even in this case, hard copies must also be submitted. If I do not receive a hard copy of an assignment I said you could email to me, I cannot guarantee that your assignment will be graded. You are responsible for ensuring I receive your assignments.

Academic Integrity: Students are required to familiarize themselves with the guidelines for academic integrity, discipline, and appeals as outlined in policies 71, 72, and 73 (links can be found at http://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/about-academic-integrity/integrity-policies-0). Serious penalties can and will result from infringements against university policies. All assignments submitted to me that lack the required MLA formatting will receive an automatic grade of zero (0). Assignments with this issue can be resubmitted with proper MLA formatting but will face standard late penalties (these assignments are still subject to the deadline

Syllabus
ENGL 108D: Digital Lives

of July 28th). If this issue recurs, there will be more severe consequences. We will cover in class what constitutes plagiarism and cheating. If, after this class discussion you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask for further clarification.

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall Rm. 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Course Structure and Practice
Tuesday, May 5: Syllabus review
Thursday, May 7: How do we relate to and through media – introduction
Readings:
➢ Danah Boyd, “Participating in the Always-On Lifestyle”
➢ Sherry Turkle, “Feel Like a Wallflower? Maybe It’s Your Facebook Wall”

Week 2: What is New Media?
Tuesday, May 12:
Object Text: Email
Readings:
➢ New Media 1.1 (9-13), 1.3 (44-51)
Thursday, May 14: How to write effectively; MLA format review

Week 3: Historical and Ideological Context
Tuesday, May 19:
Readings
➢ New Media 1.4 [skipping 1.4.3] (51-62, 65), 4.1 (237-243), 4.2 (243-244)
Thursday, May 21:
Object Text: Netflix and YouTube
Readings:
➢ New Media 3.23 (225-229)
➢ Veronique Dupont “Netflix has Revolutionized The TV Industry Several Times In Just 17 Years”

Week 4: Communication – Memes, LOLspeak, and #hashtags
Tuesday, May 26: Memes and LOLspeak
Readings
➢ Britt Peterson “The Linguistics of LOL”
➢ David Sax “The Growing Power of the Meme”
➢ “Social media leads ‘seismic’ language change”
Thursday, May 28: #hashtags
Due: Blog Post identifying your topic for your final paper
Readings:
ENGL 108D: Digital Lives

- Rebecca Murtagh “The Role of #Hashtags in Social Media and Search”
- TED Talks “Evan Williams on listening to Twitter users”
- Hannah Jane Parkinson “What rhymes with disaster? Robin Thicke trolled hard in Twitter Q&A”

**Week 5: Digital Identities – Performing the Self on Facebook and**

Tuesday, June 2:
Readings:
- *New Media* sections 4.4, 4.4.1, 4.4.2 (266-272)
- Lauren Fisher “Why social media is leading to a new era of identity”
- Casey Johnston “How we ruin social networks, Facebook specifically”

Thursday, June 4: Object Text – Your Facebook Profile

**Week 6: Digital Identities – Anonymity and Belonging**

Tuesday, June 9:
Readings:
- *New Media* 3.17 – 3.19 (209-216)

Thursday, June 11:
Object Text – r/creepyPMs
Due: Short Paper

**Week 7: Digital Identities – Vlogging and Selfies**

Tuesday, June 16: Vlogging
Readings:
- Dalmeet Singh Chawla “The young vloggers and their fans who are changing the face of youth culture”
- Joe Bish “The British Vlogger Invasion Is Vain and Inane”

Thursday, June 18: Selfies
Readings:
- PJ Vogt “In Defense of Funeral Selfies”
- SE Smith “Why we hate selfies so much”
- “Training Your Brain for Happiness, Robot Torture, the Pre-Digi Selfie, Privacy and the NSA, Status and Attention” *Spark*. – first 10 minutes (with Aimee Morrison)

**Week 8: Digital Economics – Mass Market and Conspicuous Consumption**

Tuesday, June 23: Object text – Amazon
Readings:
- Steve Wasserman “The Amazon Effect”
- Franklin Foer “Amazon Must Be Stopped”
- Joe Nocera “Amazon Plays Rough. So What?”

Thursday, June 25: Object text – YouTube Hauls
Due: Annotated bibliography; Blog post on your topic for your final paper
Object Text: YouTube Hauls (examples to be emailed)
Readings:
ENGL 108D: Digital Lives

- Alex Halperin “THE BIG HAUL: Teenage YouTube Superstar Bethany Mota Has More Fans Than Vogue And A Fashion Line Of Her Own”
- Greg Jarboe “YouTube Vloggers and Haul Girls Crush Big Beauty Industry Brands”

Week 9: Digital Economics – You are the Product
Tuesday, June 30:
Readings:
- Scott Goodson “If You’re Not Paying For It, You Become The Product”
- RadioLab “The Trust Engineers”

Thursday, July 2:
Readings:
- Michael Blanding “The Problems and Promises of Crowdfunding”
- Own Gleiberman “‘Veronica Mars’ and Kickstarter: Is this the future of movie financing?”

Week 10: Fandom – Producers and Consumers
Tuesday, July 7:
Readings:
- New Media 3.22 (220-225)

Thursday, July 9:
Due: Anticipated thesis statement, first paragraph, and outline
Readings:
- “Abusing the People of Westeros: Famous Authors on Fan-Fiction”
- “Why fans are outraged at Sherlock and Watson reading sexy fanfic”

Week 11: Gameplay
Tuesday, July 14:
Readings:
- New Media 4.5 “Gameplay” 286-306)
- Tracy V. Wilson “How World of Warcraft Works”

Thursday, July 16:
Object Text – World of Warcraft
Readings:
- “Corrupted Blood incident”
- Mark Ward “Deadly plague hits Warcraft world”

Week 12: Education and Entertainment
Tuesday, July 21:
Readings:
- New Media 4.3.2 “Edutainment, edutainment, edutainment” (258-260)
- TED talks “Let’s use video to reinvent education” Salman Khan

Thursday, July 22:
Object Texts: RadioLab and TED talks
- RadioLab “Fu-Go”
- RadioLab “Parasites”

Syllabus
7
Week 13: Social Justice Warriors and Slacktivism
Tuesday, July 28:
  Due: Self and group evaluations for blog; final paper
  Readings:
    ➢ Stuff Mom Never Told You “Social Justice Warriors”
    ➢ Morgan Levy “RT If You” The Rise in Fake Activism”
    ➢ Sabina Khan-Ibarra “The Case for Social Media and Hashtag Activism”
Thursday, July 30: No Class
  Due: Final blog post